

Message Text

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COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV PINT PORS TH PINS

SUBJECT: VIOLENCE CASTS SHADOW ON ELECTIONS

REF: (A) BANGKOK 4878, (B) BANGKOK 4760, (C) BANGKOK 4638,

(D) BANGKOK 3902, (E) BANGKOK 3553

SUMMARY. FIFTH APPARENTLY POLITICALLY MOTIVATED MURDER AND OTHER ACTS OF VIOLENCE CASTS PALL OVER ELECTIONS. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT CALLS ON POLICE TO INCREASE THEIR VIGILANCE. END SUMMARY.

1. FEBRUARY WAS AN UNLUCKY MONTH FOR THAI POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS. MARCH MAY BE NO BETTER. THE MURDER OF WAE-A-MA CHA-MA, A VOTE CANVASSER FOR A DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE IN PATTANI PROVINCE ON MARCH 3, APPEARS TO BE THE FIFTH POLITICALLY MOTIVATED ASSASSINATION SINCE THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN BEGAN. WAE-A-MA WAS A VOTE CANVASSER FOR DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE SURAPHONG RATCHAMUK, WHO IS RUNNING FOR ONE OF THE THREE SEATS IN PATTANI PROVINCE. ACCORDING TO THE MARCH 4 BANGKOK POST THE DISTRICT POLICE CHIEF THEORIZED THAT THE GUNMEN WHO KILLED WAE-A-MA WERE

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HIRED BY A POLITICAL OPPONENT.

2. ON FEBRUARY 9 SURAPHON SIRUNGSUKCHINDA, A VOTE CANVASSER FOR SIRI SIRIYOTHIN, MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE THAI NATION PARTY (TN), WAS ASSASSINATED IN CHONBURI PROVINCE, ON FEBRUARY 12 SURACHAI SAENGWANTI, VOTE CANVASSER FOR PIYA ANGKINA, TN MP FROM PHETBURI, WAS ASSASSINATED IN HIS HOME PROVINCE. NSCT ACTIVIST AMARET CHAISA-AT WAS MURDERED IN KORAT ON FEBRUARY 19 (SEE REF D) AS WAS BUNSANONG BUNYOTHAYAN, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND IN BANGKOK ON FEBRUARY 28, (SEE REF C). MEMBERS OF THE RIGHT WING RED GAUR MOVEMENT BOMBED THE NEW FORCE PARTY HEADQUARTERS IN FEBRUARY (SEE REF E). ONE RED GAUR WAS KILLED AND ONE WAS INJURED.

3. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRITPRAMOT RESPONDED TO THE CONCERN IN BANGKOK CAUSED BY THE RECENT ASSASSINATIONS AND OTHER ACTS OF VIOLENCE BY HOLDING A MEETING ON MARCH 4 WITH THE TOP ECHELONS OF THE POLICE DEPARTMENT. THE MARCH 5 BANGKOK POST REPORTS THAT KHUKRIT ISSUED SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS TO THE POLICE TO PREVENT ANY FURTHER "POLITICAL VIOLENCE." WHILE ADMITTING THAT THE POLICE ARE OVERWORKED AND UNDERSTAFFED, HE STRESSED THE NEED TO PROTECT POLITICIANS CAMPAIGNING FOR THE ELECTIONS. KHUKRIT WAS PROVOKED INTO CALLING THE MEETING BY BUNSANONG'S ASSASSINATION AND THE BOMBING AT RAMA VI ENGINEERING SCHOOL (SEE REF A), THE LATTER OF WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BEEN POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. THE POLICE HAVE MADE NO APPARENT PROGRESS IN EITHER CASE.

4. THE BANGKOK POST OF MARCH 5 REPORTS THAT DEMOCRAT PARTY LEADER SENI PRAMOT WAS GRAVELY CONCERNED BY THE POLITICAL VIOLENCE WHICH HAS RECENTLY ERUPTED IN BANGKOK. HE BLAMED THE INCIDENTS ON THE ILLEGAL MOVEMENTS WHICH ARE ALLOWED TO OPERATE FREELY IN THAILAND AND WHICH HAVE FOSTERED DIVISION AMONG THE PEOPLE. SENI IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE SITUATION IS RIPE FOR EXPLOITATION BY TERRORIST GROUPS AND THAT NOW ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE, EVEN A MILITARY COUP.

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5. COMMENT: THE STATEMENTS OF THE PRAMOT BROTHERS REFLECT THE GREAT CONCERN THROUGHOUT THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY IN THAILAND CAUSED BY THE RECENT SPATE OF APPARENTLY POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE, IN PARTICULAR BY BUNSANONG'S ASSASSINATION. INDIVIDUAL POLITICIANS, ESPECIALLY "LEFT WINGERS", HAVE EXPRESSED FEAR FOR THEIR LIVES. SOME POLITICIANS FEAR THESE KILLINGS MAY PROVOKE REPRISALS. OTHERS SUSPECT THAT THESE INCIDENTS MAY HAVE

PLANNED OR, AT THE VERY LEAST, WOULD BE USED BY
"RIGHT WINGERS" AS AN EXCUSE TO STAGE A COUP OR TO
POSTPONE THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS. THE EMBASSY HAS
REPORTED ITS ASSESSMENTS ON THESE POSSIBILITIES PRE-
VIOUSLY (SEE REF B). PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT REITERATED
ON MARCH 4 THAT THE ELECTIONS WILL DEFINITELY BE HELD
AS SCHEDULED. BUT THESE ACTS OF VIOLENCE HAVE CAST A
PALL OVER THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS.

WHITEHOUSE

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